

VZCZCXRO6379  
OO RUEHBC RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW  
RUEHROV  
DE RUEHKA #0218/01 0610851  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 020851Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8385  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1997  
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2781  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0153  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC  
RUCNFB/FBI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHHJJPI/PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DHAKA 000218

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/PB, SCA/FO, DS, AND CA/OCS;  
NEW DELHI FOR LEGAT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH FORMALLY REQUESTS USG ASSISTANCE WITH  
BDR MUTINY INVESTIGATION

REF: DHAKA 213 AND PREVIOUS

Summary  
=====

1. (U) This is an action request.

2. (C) The Foreign Minister told the Ambassador Bangladesh appreciated the strong support the USG had rendered during the Bangladesh Rifles Mutiny and aftermath, and requested assistance in conducting the investigation into the mutiny and identifying remains. The Prime Minister's priority during the crisis was to minimize the loss of life, the FM stressed. Due to the nature of the attack, the GOB believed there was prior planning but had no evidence about who had been involved. The Prime Minister had decided to address army officers March 1 despite opposition from her cabinet colleagues in an attempt to show solidarity with the armed forces. The GOB did not believe the opposition had played a responsible role during the crisis, the FM said. Action Request: The USG should continue to support the democratically elected government, and we recommend a positive response to the request for assistance.

Foreign Minister Requests USG Assistance  
=====

3. (C) The Ambassador was called in to meet with Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Dipu Moni and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Hasan Mahmud March 2. The Ambassador expressed condolences for the loss of life during the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutiny and offered the GOB U.S. support at this difficult time. The Foreign Minister said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had deeply appreciated SCA Assistant Secretary Boucher's March 1 phone call on behalf of Secretary Clinton. The Minister termed the mutiny a great tragedy for Bangladesh and said the level of brutality had been stunning. The Foreign Minister conveyed a formal request for USG assistance with the investigation. (Note: While initially asking for "FBI" assistance, the Foreign Minister clarified that help from any part of the USG would be welcome).

4. (C) The Ambassador promised to convey the GOB request for assistance to Washington and asked whether there were any specific areas in which help was needed. The Foreign Minister said Bangladesh would welcome USG expertise in assisting with the investigation, including forensics. She

added that there was a particular need for assistance with identification of remains, many of which were in very poor condition. The Foreign Minister said it was particularly important for family members to know what had happened to loved ones.

#### Response Intended to Minimize Loss of Life =====

15. (C) The Foreign Minister stressed that the Prime Minister had taken swift action in response to the crisis. Sheikh Hasina's primary concern had been limiting the number of casualties. The BDR compound was situated in the middle of a built up area and any military action would have affected hundreds of thousands of people and certainly resulted in a great number of casualties. For this reason, the GOB had decided to exercise great caution. According to information gleaned from survivors, all of the killings had taken place immediately after the incident began. The Foreign Minister said military action would have led to thousands of additional deaths.

#### Looking for Hidden Hand =====

16. (C) The State Minister characterized this as the greatest loss of officers in the history of the Bangladesh Army \* even greater than the number of officer deaths suffered during the Liberation War. Hasan said the GOB was very grateful to the U.S., which had supported Bangladesh's democratic transition and now supported the country as it faced a plot to destroy democracy. The State Minister

DHAKA 00000218 002 OF 003

claimed the incident had not been simply the result of anger but argued that &people who did not want democracy8 had a hand in the violence. He defended the Prime Minister's handling of the crisis, saying military action would have also provoked trouble at BDR camps outside Dhaka.

17. (C) Responding to a question from the Ambassador, the Foreign Minister said it was still too soon to say who was behind the mutiny. She said the nature of the killing showed -- it could hardly have been the result of spontaneous anger and could only have taken place with a great deal of preparation. She focused on the number of officers killed, the efforts to dispose of the bodies, and the planning to allow conspirators to flee as evidence of prior preparation. The Foreign Minister also said it was hard to believe that ordinary soldiers could have committed such brutality. She said that the nature of the murders was reminiscent of attacks involving militant groups but cautioned that at this point there was only speculation and no hard evidence tying any specific group to the attack. The Minister said it was important to have a thorough investigation and bring those responsible to justice.

#### Get A Full Picture Before Drawing Conclusions =====

18. (C) The Ambassador told the Foreign Minister the USG did not have any information that an outside group was behind the mutiny. The USG would keep an open mind and work with the GOB to uncover whether there was an outside actor. At the same time, the speculation about a conspiracy could have consequences down the line if an investigation did not uncover any outside role: it could lead to later accusations of a cover up. The Foreign Minister agreed that this was possible but said that accounts from survivors indicated that officers had been killed in a methodical way, strongly suggesting advanced planning. The Minister said it would be important for investigators to talk to all witnesses to get a full picture of what had happened.

19. (C) The Foreign Minister acknowledged Bangladesh's violent past, including past mutinies and coups. She noted

that over 600 officers and soldiers had been killed in a coup attempt in November 1977. But nothing on this scale had happened in decades. The Foreign Minister also noted with concern that the Prime Minister had visited BDR HQ the day prior to the mutiny.

#### Implications for Civil Military Relations

¶10. (C) The Foreign Minister hoped the incident would consolidate the relationship between the civilian government and the military. She said the armed forces were part of the government and said it was "our Army." Whatever had happened during the previous two years of the Caretaker Government, nobody could condone these killings. She admitted that one or two Members of Parliament had earlier been critical of the Army's role in torturing individuals during the State of Emergency. She also said that most people did not like what had happened during the past two years, but that did not mean they did not support the army now.

¶11. (C) The State Minister noted the Prime Minister had gone to the Cantonment March 1 to meet with Army Officers to listen to their concerns. The Foreign Minister admitted that she and a number of her cabinet colleagues had not been comfortable with the decision and had tried to convince the Prime Minister not to go. In response, the Prime Minister had told them she was not only the head of government and Defense Minister, but also "daughter of the Father of the Nation," and as such had a duty to know the grievances of her people. Both Ministers agreed that this event had given the officers an opportunity to vent their frustrations.

#### Laying down Marker on Army Role In Fugitive Search

DHAKA 00000218 003 OF 003

¶12. (C) The Ambassador noted that the GOB had decided to authorize army officers to participate in "Operation Rebel Hunt" to capture BDR fugitives (septel). The Ambassador stressed the importance of avoiding human rights abuses during the search. The Foreign Minister readily agreed.

#### Critical of Opposition Role

¶13. (C) The Foreign Minister criticized the Opposition's actions in Parliament the previous day, saying they "had left a bad taste." The State Minister asked why the Leader of the Opposition had not gone to the House on the 25th or 26th while the crisis was ongoing. After all, the Home Minister and other Cabinet colleagues had attended parliament throughout the crisis at the Prime Minister's instruction. The Foreign Minister criticized the Opposition for opposing the Speaker's attempt to table the Parliament's condolence message without debate. Instead, the Leader of the Opposition and other members had insisted on speaking.

¶14. (C) The Foreign Minister said that the tragedy had touched the government deeply with many members having lost family members. The Foreign Minister noted that one of her relatives, an Army major, had died. The Ambassador stressed our calls for all Bangladeshis to work together, including the government and opposition.

#### Comment/Action Request

¶15. (C) The GOB greatly appreciates the strong international support it has received during the crisis, notably from the U.S. The Government has indicated its plans to request assistance for the investigation from a number of countries, beginning with the U.S. We strongly recommend that the USG respond positively to this request. This will underscore the value that we place on helping this young

democracy through its first major crisis. Assistance will also provide us an opportunity to help ensure an honest investigation into this tragedy. A leading US role will also be welcomed by a grieving public and armed forces.

MORIARTY